



Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council

Minutes of the Annual Parish Assembly held at 7.30pm on Tuesday
17th April 2018 at Meldon Village Hall

Parish councillors present

D Webber, P Heard, R Maile, M Cooper, A Ewen, B Wood, J Heard

Guest speakers

Chris Brooking & Gerard Lovell (Forthglade Limited)
Sue Wonnacott (Okehampton & District Community Transport Group)
Shirley Hooton (Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon CAB)
Ian Brooker (DNP Ranger)
Cllr Kevin Ball (DCC & OkeRail)

Also Present

Cllr A Leech & Cllr J Yelland (Okehampton Town Council & WDBC)
Cllr M Davies (WDBC)

Clerk – J Gillard

6 members of the public

1. Cllr Webber welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Apologies** – were received from Cllr M Littlejohns and Cllr M Davies (WDBC)

3. Chairman's report –

It has been an extremely busy and challenging year for the Council. I would like to start off by thanking the Vice Chairman, Martin Littlejohns, and all the other Councillors for their support during my illness last year, everyone did their bit to keep things going, I am very grateful.

We have now had one year of working within the new DCC boundaries and our elected representative of Cllr Kevin Ball. Thank you to him for his support and we will hear more from him later on.

The Council continues to be represented on many local groups: Okehampton United Charities, Holditch Trust, Northern Parishes Links Group, Chamber of Trade, Okehampton Matters. Meldon Hall, and OkeRail Forum. You will hear more about that Group later. We have taken part in the Remembrance Day parade, and Ten Tors Breakfast, Commoners meeting

We have continued to support local organisations where residents of the parish benefit from the work they do:

Royal British Legion
Okehampton & District Community Transport Group
Meldon Viaduct Company
Citizens Advice Bureau
Okehampton Community Garden
Okehampton Air Training Corps
OCRA – for the Okehampton Sports Week
Okehampton Community Archive
Okehampton United Charity towards the allotments
Okement Rivers Improvement Group
Okehampton Chamber of Trade – Christmas lights
Okehampton Carnival

Planning – we continue to get consulted on all planning applications within The Hamlets. Activity with planning and the developments on the east of Okehampton Continue to be a big part. It is good to see the start of the new primary school, a school in the Parish will be something new for The Hamlets and something to look forward to ! We have had positive meetings with Redrow Developers, they have proposals to build some quite nice looking houses.

Okehampton Business Park – the new Forthglade building is taking shape, you will hear from them as well shortly. There are also proposals for a Skills Hub with the planning committee now, this facility is aimed at encouraging and developing new small start up businesses which will be good for the community.

The boundary stone on New Road was broken in half by a vehicle, this we have had repaired and resited sharing the costs with OTC

An additional waste bin has located in Kellands Lane to help reduce the amount of dog poo left on the ground, we have agreed to take on the emptying costs of this.

Meldon Woods-

SW Endurance used Meldon car park for their annual ride.

The second phase of tree maintenance was completed in the autumn, this is obviously at a cost to the Council but we were successful in obtaining a grant for £1000 from the Town & Parishes Fund to go towards this as from not only this Parish benefit from being able to use the Woods. We also continue to progress the 10 Year Management Plan for the Woods, the car park surface has been enhanced, repairs made to fencing and some boulders strategically placed to prevent further damage. It is disappointing when we regularly see flytipping in the area but luckily this is usually resolved quickly with the support of Ian Brooker and WDBC.

The Council is in legal negotiations with WDBC to take on additional open space in The Hamlets – namely Old Town Park. This will link in neatly with the existing land the council owns and we can use our existing skills and expertise looking after this new area when the transfer is finalised.

There was a very successful Meldon Wildlife Day organised by DNP and enjoyed by many local children as well as visitors

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We are planning to take part in The Battles Over – The Nations Tribute to WW1 Beacons of Light, so we will be up alongside the Camp lighting a beacon on 11th November

Councillors have taken advantage of training sessions held by Devon Association of Local Councils and also a workshop organised by DCC Highways.

I cannot finish without mentioning the Community Governance Review that the Council asked WDBC to undertake on our behalf. Basically because of the additional work and increased population we asked to increase the size of the Council by 2 members. As we had 5 applicants for our last vacancy, it proves we have members of the community wanting to join us. To cut a long story short, this was not approved, we are extremely disappointed and we are disappointed that our working relationship with Okehampton Town Council has taken a backward step. Our priority will be to rectify this providing all parties are prepared to move forward.

We have had a busy year, and am sure the coming year will be just as busy. We are going to have to grasp the new General Data Protection Regulations – that is the next challenge, a lot of time and effort is going to have to be spent making sure we comply

Thanks to the Clerk, and my fellow councillors for their support and work throughout the year.

4. Guest Speakers

Forthglade Limited – Chris Brooking and Gerard Lovell

The company have been on a 7 year journey, then with a potential loss of approx 75 jobs, they have recovered from that and are now growing and building new premises on the Okehampton East Business Park. The majority of their business was producing other companies brands but they now concentrate on their own, expanding sales throughout the UK and further afield. They use local suppliers wherever possible. Knowledge of their brand has trebled in 2 years. They are now in the final month of constructing their new 65,000 square foot building in Okehampton, it is an £8m investment in the building and people. 80 jobs are relocating from their existing site in Winkleigh and an additional 20 will be created in the new building. They will start relocating in June/July and be fully operational in the new site in September.

Okehampton & District Community Transport Group – Sue Wonnacott

The Group have been serving the local community for 28 years, the area covered 274 square miles. They have many vehicles, they provide Ring and Ride trips also a volunteer car scheme, they have 40 volunteer drivers. Priority is given to journeys to medical appointments, they have seen many more of these at evenings and at weekends recently. Individual clients total 1500, they also provide transport for Care Homes. They work very closely with other organisations.

Cllr Webber presented the speaker with a cheque for £500 for the organisation.

Torrige, North, Mid and West Devon CAB - Shirley Hooton

The Okehampton office is part of the Torrige North Mid and West Devon CAB, there are 11 offices across Devon. They have had a busy 12 months, they have 21 volunteers in Okehampton but need more, they have 1 full time paid supervisor and 3 project staff. A mix

of services are provided, some face to face, also on the telephone by an advice line team and also web chat and email. Over the last 12 months they have helped 2300 clients with over 4000 issues. As a result an additional benefit to clients has been provided approx £300,000. Benefits and debts are the main issues requiring help and support.

CLlr Webber presented the speaker with a cheque for £350 for the organisation.

Devon County Council & Oke Rail – Kevin Ball

CLlr Ball explained the current issues with the DCC budget ie funds from central government were reducing and costs rising. The Highways budget is £54 million, a 3% reduction, this is not enough to maintain the current standard of roads. There has been a successful business rate pilot scheme, council tax has increased by 4.9% this year.

Okehampton Hospital – the loss of beds has been frustrating.

OkeRail – a group comprising of local authorities, individuals, interested parties with the goal of reconnecting Okehampton and Exeter with a regular train service. A trial service is intended however a lot of infrastructure work is required, a report has been produced detailing the requirements, work is ongoing. The next special train is this coming Saturday to Oxford and Stratford upon Avon.

Traffic issues in Okehampton – continuing issues, work is ongoing looking at this with a view to finding a solution.

Business Park – Okehampton Skills & Sports Trust are looking at setting up at the site. 3 business have opted out of taking on plots, all for different reasons, the plots have been remarketed and 2 bids are being taken forward.

Highways – Skanska took over 12 months ago, there have been teething issues particularly with the quality of pot hole repairs and gulley cleaning.

Second Primary School – work has started on site, classes will start in Sept but on an alternative site with the new site being occupied in January 2019.

Dartmoor National Park - Ian Brooker

The Moor Otters project, which I mentioned last year, was a great success and has raised a net income of £60,000. As you know we have had to look at various ways of increasing our income and something like this was a real test of nerve in exploring something that we have never done before. The funds are to be used to further our Junior Ranger programme including a Youth Ranger scheme; erosion repairs to Moorland paths and to control non-native invasive plants such as Skunk Cabbage and Himalayan Balsam.

Other income generation will include the extension of car parking charges involving places like Haytor, Postbridge and nearer to home, Meldon Reservoir car parks.

Charges are reasonable at £1 per car for up to three hours and £2 per car for over three hours.

I am pleased to announce, that following on from a second successful event, the Meldon Wildlife Day will happen again on Tuesday August 21st based at the Old Quarry. Up to 400 people attended last year's event, all enjoying the various nature themed activities that were provided by the numerous partners that joined us on the day. We will be following a similar format and can only hope to be blessed with the same weather.

Partners include the Okehampton YHA, Mary Seddon and her wonderful snails; Natural England; West Country Rivers Trust; Devon Wildlife Trust; Local bat, amphibian and mammal groups, StOC; ORIG and hopefully RSPB, National Trust

and Woodland Trust this year to add to the range of things on offer for visitors to engage with and to learn about.

My thanks to the Parish Council for allowing us to use their land for this event and for showing such a keen interest on the day; to the Duchy who also own part of the land; the 1st Okehampton Scouts who provide most of the refreshments and to Sam Bullingham from Taw River Dairy, who joined us for the first time last year to provide ice creams during the event. (incidentally, he bid successfully for the license to provide the same service at Meldon Car park for the next 2 years bringing us in a small income but also good for us to be seen to support a relatively new local business.

I have several rights of way projects to be completed in the Parish especially following the unusual storm event that occurred last year. I did secure funding to repair the damage caused by the Redaven Brook breaking its banks which ended up destroying the ford and the surface of the bridleway but I still have outstanding projects left over from this which I have yet to secure funding for. It's a bit like the road issue that the more years go on, the list gets longer but I am competing for a decreasing pot of money which has to cover the whole of Dartmoor and other projects may well have a greater priority.

I did however successfully bid for funding from our Donate for Dartmoor fund to improve part of the right of way on Southdown and my thanks to the landowners for allowing this work to proceed.

Lastly, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my Voluntary Wardens, Jan and Neil Gilmour for their never ending help, support and encouragement throughout another year.

5. Questions from the Public – One member of the public commented that the developments around Okehampton were not helping the infrastructure issues in the area.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed at 9.00 pm. All were invited to remain for refreshments.

Signed..... Date.....